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THE SPENSERIAN STANZA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY¹

For the seventeenth century I was able to find in the regular Spenserian stanza only 18 poems by 5 men; in the eighteenth century my list includes 57 poems by 38 known poets and 8 anonymous writers. It has so often been said that Thomson's "Castle of Indolence"² in 1748, or, at the very earliest, Akenside's "Virtuoso,"³ or Shenstone's "Schoolmistress" in 1737 were the first instances of the Spenserian stanza in the eighteenth century, that it is worth while to speak in detail of the Spenserian poems of the first half of the century.

In 1702, Edward Bysshe, Gentleman, wrote in his *Art of English Poetry*, p. 33: "Spencer has composed his 'Fairy Queen' in Stanzas of 9 Verses, where the 1st rhymes to the 3d, the 2d to the 4th, 5th, and 7th; and the 6th to the two last. But this Stanza is very difficult to maintain, and the unlucky choice of it reduc'd him often to the necessity of making use of many exploded Words; nor has he, I think, been follow'd in it by any of the Moderns."

I have not seen the first edition, but the second edition, 1705, "corrected and improved," seems to have its changes chiefly in the third part, the "Collection of the most Natural, Agreeable, and Sublime Thoughts." In 1705, at any rate, Bysshe was fairly within bounds in his statement that Spenser had not been followed "by any of the Moderns," for Dr. Samuel Woodford in 1679 was, so far as I know, the latest user of the regular Spenserian stanza. About 1705, however, Alexander Pope wrote the five stanzas of his "Spenserian Imitation, The Alley." It is commonly considered burlesque; to call it serious is too much, but it is also too much to say that it

¹ See *Modern Philology*, IV, 639, April, 1907, for "The Spenserian Stanza before 1700."

² Thomson's "revival in the 'Castle of Indolence' of the Spenserian stanza," Austin Dobson in Chambers' *Encyclopaedia of English Lit.*, II, 11a, 1903.

³ Akenside "published the 'Virtuoso,' a poem in Spenserian stanzas, which preceded in publicity both Thomson's and Shenstone's efforts in that form, the honor of reviving which should therefore rest with Akenside."—Edmund Gosse, *Eighteenth Century Lit.*, 311. Mr. Gosse had forgotten that on p. 138 he had said that Croxall had "issued two cantos in imitation of the 'Fairy Queen.'"

ridicules Spenser. The truth is, as we shall see, when we come to the comments on Spenser, that Pope, like many another youthful poet, experimented with various meters, and in the end used the form which best suited his habit of mind: Coleridge, for example, who certainly possessed some of the poetical qualities which Pope has been accused of lacking, also tried the Spenserian stanza in his youth, tried it only once, and without conspicuous success. Pope's stanzas seem to have been first published in 1727, so that they were preceded in print by those of Samuel Croxall, D.D., who in 1713 published a poem in the regular Spenserian stanza, entitled: "An Original Canto of Spenser: Design'd as Part of his 'Fairy Queen,' but never printed. Now made public by Nestor Ironside, Esq." Though this poem was dated 1714, the *Examiner* of December 18, 1713, animadverted upon it, and called forth on December 19, 1713, the "Examiner Examined." In 1714, Nestor Ironside put forth "Another Original Canto," etc., while the "Original Canto" went into its second and third editions. Later in 1714 appeared "An Ode, humbly inscrib'd to the King, occasion'd by his Majesty's most auspicious accession and arrival, written in the stanza and measure of Spenser. By Mr. Croxall," who naively subscribed himself "Author of the Two Original Cantos," etc. Although these "Original Cantos" were frankly satirical, the "Ode to the King" was an entirely serious poem, in which allegory was made to serve, not satire, but flattery.

A year later, in 1715, John Hughes published an edition of Spenser, the first since 1679, and which seems to have sufficed until 1750, when a second edition appeared. There may have been some connection between Croxall and Hughes, but I have not been able to trace it.

After Croxall's poems of 1714, the next poems in the regular stanza are William Thompson's in 1736, more than twenty years later; at no other time in the eighteenth century, however, was there a gap of more than eight years. Professor Phelps, who called attention to Thompson in 1893, in his *Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, has pointed out not only Thompson's importance as a pioneer in Romanticism, but also that he has substantial claims upon our attention as a graceful poet and a genuine lover of nature.

Thompson's "Epithalamium on the Royal Nuptials of May, 1736," and "The Nativity, a College Exercise" are both entirely serious poems, without a hint of satire and with many beautiful, melodious stanzas. Mark Akenside's "Virtuoso," therefore, which appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for April, 1737, was preceded, as we have seen, by at least six poems in the regular stanza. Akenside was followed in the same year by Shenstone, whose "Schoolmistress" was then printed in imperfect form, and completed in 1742. In 1739 appeared two poems, the "Abuse of Travelling," which we know is by Gilbert West, and "A Canto of the Fairy Queen," which seems to be his. In 1747, Robert Bedingfield, Dr. Gloster Ridley, and Christopher Pitt all published Spenserian imitations, so that James Thomson's "Castle of Indolence" (the longest Spenserian poem of the century), had a fairly long list of recent predecessors.

The "Castle of Indolence," it will be remembered, came out only four years after Pope's death, at a time when Pope's influence was presumably at its height; yet the poem was immediately popular, for the *London Magazine* for September, 1748, noted the appearance of the second edition. Moreover, Thomson was far from being the only Spenserian who was read in those days: Dodsley's famous *Collection*, the first three volumes of which appeared in January, 1748, and which went through five editions in ten years, contained Shenstone's "Schoolmistress," Gilbert West's "Abuse of Travelling," Gloster Ridley's "Psyche," Bedingfield's "Education of Achilles," and the elder William Melmoth's "Transformation of Lycon and Euphormio." The first half of the eighteenth century, then, the period when the vogue of the heroic couplet was surely at its highest, produced 18 poems in the stanza of Spenser—exactly as many as I have been able to find in the entire seventeenth century; and these 18 poems were by 13 poets, as against 5 in the seventeenth century. What is still more to the point, the poems of Akenside, Shenstone, and James Thomson are still known by reputation, and those of William Thompson ought to be, while not one of the seventeenth-century poems is known except to the special student.

Along with these fairly numerous poems in the regular stanza were many imitations, some of which are especially interesting. In 1706, Prior, in his "Ode to the Queen," invented one which in its

structure seems characteristically Classical. It is composed of two heroic quatrains and a couplet, with the second line of the couplet an Alexandrine. In the course of the century, 23 poets wrote 34 poems in this stanza, so that it was at times nearly as popular as the regular stanza, although it by no means displaced it. Samuel Wesley, the younger, between 1724 and 1735, wrote three poems in this stanza. In 1741, Samuel Boyse, one of the literary vagabonds of his day, wrote in it 140 stanzas of "Cambuscan; or the Squire's Tale of Chaucer." George Ogle continued "Cambuscan" for 74 stanzas, "from the 4th Book of Spenser's 'Fairy Queen'"; and in 1785, Joseph Sterling added another 97 stanzas. Ogle's paraphrase is one of the very few attempts in the eighteenth century to "modernize" Spenser, and is the only one of technical interest.¹

¹ Of Ogle's 74 stanzas, 73 are paraphrases of the "Fairy Queen," IV, ii, 35-54; IV, iii, 1-52; and IV, iv, 1, so that only one stanza (his last) is entirely his own. In a third of the stanzas, Ogle uses Spenser's Alexandrines with slight changes; only eight of them does he take unchanged. And so it is with the stanzas as wholes: Spenser's ideas are there, but phrasing and cadence are gone for the most part. In 14 stanzas there is no trace of Spenser's lines; in 13, only three lines can by any stretch be called Spenser's, and in only 17 stanzas does Ogle borrow more than three lines. In fact, of the more than 650 lines, only 42 are taken unchanged; in a dozen the order only is altered; in 86 only one word is changed; that is to say, only about 2½ per cent of Ogle's lines owe their form to Spenser. Some of Ogle's changes were mere substitutions of modern for archaic words, as in

	Pardon to grant, and rigor to abate
for Spenser's	To graunt her boone, and rigour to abate,
or	And chang'd, at Pleasure, for those Sons of thine,
for Spenser's	And chaung'd at pleasure for those impes of thine.
Others seem matters of cadence, like	
	And know the utmost measure of their date
for Spenser's	And know the measure of their utmost date,
or	And each to other seem'd the vict'ry there to yield
for Spenser's	And each to other seemd the victorie to yield.
Most of them, however, were injections of eighteenth-century taste, as in	
	Tost like the vessel on the surging wave
for	Tossing them like a boate amid the mayne,
or	Soon as the face of Heav'n was streak'd with red,
for	So soon as heavens window shewed light.

In 1774, and again in 1783, there were anonymous attempts to turn Spenser into blank verse. Of the later of these, the *Monthly Review* for October, 1785, wrote:

"An attempt of this kind may be intended to render Spenser . . . more agreeable, by breaking the tedious uniformity of the stanza, of which most readers are apt to complain.

"The pause is not sufficiently marked, nor sufficiently varied; which renders the blank verse as tiresome as the stanza, the kind of poetry which, after all, will be found the most proper for Spenser's thoughts and descriptions."

In 1747 appeared in this stanza anonymously "A New Canto of Spenser's 'Fairy Queen,'" ascribed to John Upton who published an edition of Spenser in 1758. Samuel Boyse also was not too careful in his language, for in 1748 he wrote in this ten-line stanza "Irene, an Heroic Ode in the Stanza of Spenser." In 1749, Gilbert West used the stanza, which he called "Decades," to translate Pindar's "First Pythian Ode," which seems to have inspired an anonymous translator, the next year, of Pindar's "Eighth Isthmian."

Besides this popular one of Prior's, there were 13 other ten-line stanzas in the eighteenth century, which were modeled on Spenser's. Akenside invented one, rhyming *ababccdeed* which he used in three
⁵⁶
 "Odes," and which at least three other poets copied in short poems. Thomas Chatterton used repeatedly one which rhymes *ababbcbdd*,
⁵⁶
 and which he probably invented, although William Browne of Tavistock had used the rhyme scheme without the concluding Alexandrine.

Of nine-line variations of Spenser's stanza, there were 18 stanza-forms, in 22 poems by 14 poets. The only one used by more than two poets rhymes *ababdcdd*; I found it first in Robert Lloyd's
⁵⁶
 "Progress of Envy," March, 1751. Lloyd was followed by Robert Ferguson in 1773, and by Thomas Dermody in 1792. Lloyd pre-faced his poem with this statement:

As I did not suppose that Imitators were bound to transcribe the Faults as well as Excellencies of their Originals, I made no Scruple of making a slight Alteration in Spenser's Stanza, which is universally condemned for the Redundancy of its correspondent Rhymes. . . . I have, in general, rather wished to fall into Spenser's Way of Thinking than his Manner of cloathing his Sentiments, because I think his Imagery infinitely superior to his Stile.

In 1767, Walter Harte tried an interesting variation which runs *ababbcdcd*, but he tried it in only one short poem and so far as I know has not been imitated. In 1785, an anonymous poet in the *London Magazine* published a poem which rhymed *ababbcbcb*;
⁵⁶
 perhaps the five *b*-rhymes had something to do with his stopping at the end of the fourth stanza. The most surprising of these nine-line stanzas, *abbaccddc*, William Sotheby used, and apparently

invented, in 1798 for the 910 stanzas of his translation of Wieland's "Oberon." Wieland's poem is in octosyllabic couplets, but if "Oberon" suggested the "Fairy Queen," it is strange that Sotheby should have devised so strange a variation of Spenser's stanza, when he had the sanction not only of the "Fairy Queen," but of the "Castle of Indolence" and the "Minstrel." Only one poet—Thomas Park, in eight "Stanzas on the Death of Dame Morris" in 1797—used the Spenserian rhyme-scheme, but with a septenary instead of an Alexandrine.¹ All of these nine-line variations come after 1750, and very few of them had been used in the seventeenth century. The most notable omission is that the eighteenth century did not once, so far as I know, use the *ottava rima* with an added Alexandrine.

After the true Spenserian stanza, and the ten-line variation of Prior, comes in point of use the *ababcc* stanza with its last line lengthened. At various times through the century 16 poets wrote 30 poems, all short, the two longest late in the century by Anna Seward and Robert Southey, having each 47 stanzas.² As in the case of the seventeenth century, some of the variations of this *ababcc* stanza are interesting. In 1731, in *A Miscellany of Poems by Several Hands*, published at Oxford by J. Husbands, are three poems by an anonymous poet or poets, in which the sixth line is a septenary. These poems are fairly long, running 26, 19, and 19 stanzas.³ William Whitehead seems to have invented the formula *ababcc* in 1744, and⁴⁵⁶ was followed by Vansittart, an anonymous "Hymen," and Anna Seward. In other stanzas also one occasionally finds a series of tetrameter lines concluded by a pentameter and an Alexandrine.

In its variations and imitations of Spenser's stanza, the seventeenth century had shown little fondness for the linking of the quatrains, and the eighteenth century for the most part followed the

¹ In 1818, Shelley, in his "Stanzas Written in Dejection," reduced the first eight lines to tetrameters; and in 1827, William and Mary Howitt, in their "Stanzas to Bernard Barton," reduced the first eight lines to trimeters.

² The only really extended poem in this stanza, that I know of, is Francis Hodgson's "The Friend, a Poem," 1818, which has 423 stanzas.

³ The only other instances of this stanza I have found are five poems by Oscar Wilde, written about 1880; they are all distinctly longer than the eighteenth-century poems, for "Panthea" has 30 stanzas, the "Garden of Eros" 46, "The Burden of Itys" 58, "Humanidad" 73, and "Charmides" 101.

taste of the seventeenth. But toward the close of the eighteenth century, the vogue of the regular Spenserian stanza, assisted perhaps by the rapidly growing practice of the Italian sonnet, seems to have made it clear that the final Alexandrine was not the only element of charm in Spenser's stanza.

With this review of the principal poems both in the true stanza and in its most used imitations, we can turn to the various eighteenth-century criticisms of Spenser's stanza, to see how nearly use followed prescription. After Bysshe's comment of 1705, already quoted, came Prior's. In the Preface to his "Ode humbly address'd to the Queen; written in imitation of Spenser's Style," 1706, he said in part:

As to the Style, the Choice I made of following the Ode in Latin, determin'd me in English to the Stanza; and herein it was impossible not to have a Mind to follow our great Countryman SPENSER, which I have done (as well at least as I could) in the Manner of my Expression, and the Turn of my Number: Having only added one Verse to his Stanza, which I thought made the Number more Harmonious; and avoided such of his Words, as I found obsolete. I have however retain'd some few of them, to make the Colouring look more like Spenser's. Behest, Command; Band, Army; Prowess, Strength; I weet, I know; I ween, I think; whilom, heretofore; and Two or Three more of that Kind, which I hope the Ladies will Pardon me, and not judge my Muse less handsome, though for once she appears in a Farthingal. I have also in Spenser's Manner, used Caesar for Emperor, Boya for Bavaria, Bavar for that Prince, Ister for Danube, Iberia for Spain, &c. . . .

My two great Examples, HORACE and SPENSER, in many Things resemble each other: Both have a Height of Imagination, and a Majesty of Expression in describing the Sublime; and both know to temper those Talents, and sweeten the Description, so as to make it Lovely as well as Pompous: Both have equally that agreeable Manner of mixing Morality with their Story, and that Curiosa Felicitas in the Choice of their Diction, which every Writer aims at, and so very few have reach'd: Both are particularly fine in their Images and Knowing in their Numbers. . . .

Prior's criticism is both acute and sympathetic; it was no small matter, in 1706, for a prominent Classicist to link Horace and Spenser, and to pick out as their chief excellences "that Curiosa Felicitas in the Choice of their Diction, which every Writer aims at, and so very few have reach'd; Both are particularly fine in their Images, and Knowing in their Numbers." It is to be noted, too, that Prior

has no hint of condescension in his attitude toward Spenser. He does not enter into any explanation as to why he thought the extra line made "the Number more harmonious"; but we shall find that a chief objection to Spenser's stanza was the four lines rhyming together, which the independent quatrains avoided.

The next few passages, with some others in this chapter, are obviously so slight as to seem hardly worth quoting. They are all short, however, so that it seems best to give them, if only for the sake of completeness, and to show that some possible sources have not been overlooked. In February, 1707, Samuel Cobb referred to Prior's "Ode," in the Prefatory Discourse to his *Poems on Several Occasions*. Talking of the battle of Ramillies, he said:

There are several others on that Subject, and some will bear the Test; one particularly, written in imitation of the Style of Spencer; and goes under the name of Mr. Prior; I have not read it through, but *ex pede Herculem*. He is a gentleman who cannot write ill. Yet some of our criticks have fell upon it, as the Viper did on the File, to the Detriment of their Teeth.¹

In 1709 we get a faint allusion to Spenser in the Preface to John Reynolds' "Death, a Philosophical Poem," in which he asked:

Or has the Ruggedness and Antique Dress of Dr. Henry More's Philosophical Essays discourag'd others from attempting anything in the like kind?

In his third edition, in 1735, Reynolds changed his sentence to read:

Dr. H. More has attempted some Philosophical odes; but the antique dress and measures, that he has chosen, it is to be feared, have prejudiced his own, and discouraged others.

In 1709 also appeared "Licentia Poetica discuss'd: or, the true test of poetry," a poem, with preface and notes, by William Coward, M.D. In one passage Dr. Coward says:

Spencer, in this unfortunately Great,
New Schemes erected, old ones to defeat.
But, like *Miltonian Verse*, they pleased but few,
And those Perhaps, because the Schemes were New.

To these lines Coward appended this note:

It was fit I should name some Poem of this Nation, which is Spenser's "Fairy Queen," wrote in Imitation of the Old Latin Poets, with Hexameter

¹ Quoted from 3d ed., 1710.

and Pentameter Verses, which some in this present Age pretend to imitate. But the Grace of that Poem seems to consist more in the Design, than Curiosity of Rhyme, or Expressions.

In 1715, John Hughes prefixed to his edition of Spenser some "Remarks on the 'Faerie Queene'" in which he wrote:

As to the stanza in which the "Faerie Queene" is written, though the author cannot be commended in the choice of it, yet it is much more harmonious in its kind than the heroick verse of that age; it is almost the same with what the Italians call their *ottava rima*, which is used both by Ariosto and Tasso, but improved by Spenser, with the addition of a line more in the close, of the length of our Alexandrines. The defect of it in long or narrative poems is apparent; the same measure, closed always by a full stop, in the same place, by which every stanza is made as it were a distinct paragraph, grows tiresome by continual repetition, and frequently breaks the sense, when it ought to be carried on without interruption. With this exception the reader will, however, find it harmonious, full of well-sounding epithets, and of such elegant turns on the thought and words, that Dryden himself owned he learned these graces of verse chiefly from our author and does not scruple to say, that "in this particular, only Virgil surpassed him among the Romans, and only Mr. Waller among the English."

Obviously Hughes does very little more than echo Bysshe's comment of a few years earlier; even his mistaken explanation of where Spenser got his stanza might have been deduced from Bysshe. Hughes sent a copy of his "Remarks" to Pope, who wrote in acknowledgment:

Spenser has been ever a favorite poet to me; he is like a mistress whose faults we see, but love her with them all.¹

Years later, Spence, in his *Anecdotes*, records Pope as saying:

After my reading a Canto of Spenser two or three days ago to an old lady between seventy and eighty, she said that I had been showing her a collection of pictures. She said very right; and I know not how it is, but there is something in Spenser that pleases one as strongly in one's old age as it did in one's youth. I read the "Faerie Queene" when I was about twelve, with a vast deal of delight; and I think it gave me as much when I read it over about a year or two ago.²

These two statements, more than a quarter of a century apart and undoubtedly sincere, are of especial interest as coming from the most skilful wielder of the strict heroic couplet. Pope knew what

¹ Works, XI, 120.

² Ed. of 1820, pp. 86-87, 1743-44.

he could do best, in what direction his peculiar genius lay; but he showed himself none the less capable of enjoying work of a very different kind.

In 1718, in the Preface to "Solomon," a long poem in heroic couplets, Prior commented as follows on the difference between couplet and stanza:

I would say one word of the measure in which this, and most poems of this age are written. Heroic with continued rhyme, as Donne and his contemporaries used it, carrying the sense of one verse most commonly into another, was found too dissolute and wild, and came very often too near prose. As Davenant and Waller corrected, and Dryden perfected it; it is too confined: it cuts off the sense at the end of every first line which must always rhyme to the next following; and consequently produces too frequent an identity in the sound, and brings every couplet to the point of an epigram. It is indeed too broken and weak, to convey the sentiments and represent the images proper for Epic. And as it tires the writer while he composes, it must do the same to the reader while he repeats; especially in a poem of any considerable length.

If striking out into blank verse, as Milton did (and in this kind Mr. Philips, had he lived, would have excelled) or running the thought into Alternate or Stanza, which allows a greater variety, and still preserves the dignity of the verse, as Spenser and Fairfax have done; if either of these, I say, be a proper remedy for my poetical complaint, or if any other may be found, I dare not determine; I am only enquiring, in order to be better informed. . . . But once more: he that writes in rhimes, dances in fetters: and as his chain is more extended, he may certainly take longer steps.

By "heroic with continued rhyme" Prior meant what we usually call enjambed or run-on couplets. Theoretically, to "run on" couplets is to take a form admirably adapted to express concise, sententious, or witty ideas, and to ignore the primary function of the couplet rhyme; Prior saw this clearly, as he also saw that strict use "brings every couplet to the point of an epigram." But Prior had what seems to have been the peculiarly characteristic attitude of the early eighteenth century. An age of reason, reacting extremely from an age of, in literature at least, fantastic license, sought above all things for finality and authority. Charles II and his court had passed their exile in France at a time when French literature was in the hands of dogmatists who spoke with unlimited assumption of authority. At the Restoration Englishmen found in this authority more and more of a refuge. After so much turmoil, and in literature

so much metaphysical preciosity, solid, tangible, reasonable authority, especially when upheld by men of such force as Dryden, Addison, Swift, and Pope's circle, carried a weight that we, the inheritors of a century of Romanticism, can appreciate, or even understand, only with difficulty. Even the greater men deferred to authority, and bent their judgment to its decrees. But deference of judgment does not, except in the weak, result in suppression of tastes and likings. At most it colors one's phrasing, and obscures without obliterating. Some of the eighteenth-century writers were silent, either as being wholly in accord with the dogmas of the age, or as discreet conformists. Others, like Dr. Johnson, and Prior in the passages just quoted, spoke "under correction"; still others, especially in matters of taste rather than of reason, spoke apologetically. It is on record that Sir Walter Scott even was half ashamed of his fondness for folk-lore and ballads, until he chanced to hear that the Germans had taken up the subject seriously. The temptation is strong, therefore, to maintain that the witnesses I have to offer of Spenser's popularity in the eighteenth century are largely what the lawyers call "unwilling witnesses," who give evidence reluctantly, and whose testimony is therefore worth somewhat more than its face value. But it is surely not too much to point out that the increase in the reading public was great enough to make a market for many kinds of literature, and thus to encourage the writing of many kinds. Consequently the tendency which finally blossomed into the Romanticism of the first quarter of the eighteenth century had room in which to exist and grow alongside of Classicism. My main contention, which this history of the Spenserian stanza is designed to illustrate, is that, almost from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Romantic tendency was never extinguished, or even suppressed, but was during the first half of the century only less prominent than the Classic spirit, and after 1750 received more and more open encouragement and recognition.

Between 1740 and 1750,¹ William Thompson, who has already

¹ Ralph Straus, in his bibliography of Dodsley's publications (*Robert Dodsley, Poet, Publisher, and Playwright*, 1910, p. 331) records Thompson's "Hymn to May" as published on April 28, 1746. The copy in the British Museum has the date trimmed off, and the Catalogue conjectures "1740?" The copy in the Bodleian is reported "n.d.," though whether or not the title-page is perfect, I do not know.

been mentioned, published a "Hymn to May" with a preface which began:

As Spenser is the most descriptive and florid of all our English writers, I attempted to imitate his manner, in the following vernal Poem. I have been very sparing of the antiquated words, which are too frequent in most of the imitations of this author; however, I have introduced a few here and there, which are explained at the bottom of each page where they occur. Shakespeare is the Poet of Nature, in adapting the affections and passions to his characters; and Spenser in describing her delightful scenes and rural beauties. His lines are most musically sweet; and his descriptions most delicately abundant, even to a wantonness of painting: but still it is the music and painting of Nature. We find no ambitious ornaments, or epigrammatical turns, in his writings, but a beautiful simplicity; which pleases far above the glitter of pointed wit. I endeavored to avoid the affectation of the one, without any hopes of attaining the graces of the other kind of writing. . . .

A modern writer has, I know, objected against running the verse into alternat and stanza: but Mr. Prior's authority is sufficient for me, who observes that it allows a greater variety, and still preserves the dignity of the verse. As I professed myself in this Canto to take Spenser for my model, I chose the stanza; which I think adds both a sweetness and solemnity at the same time to subjects of this rural and flowery nature. The most descriptive of our old Poets have always used it, from Chaucer down to Fairfax, and even long after him. I followed Fletcher's measure in his "Purple Island"; a poem, printed at Cambridge in 12 Cantos, in quarto, scarce heard of in this age, yet the best in the allegorical way (next to the "Fairy Queen"), in the English language. The Alexandrine line, I think, is peculiarly graceful at the end, and is an improvement on Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. . . .¹

Thompson possibly refers to Dr. Samuel Woodford, who, in the preface to his "Paraphrase upon the Canticles," 1679, says:

If therefore Ourselves or the French will use Blank Verse, either in an Heroick Poem, where they should be, I think, Couplets, as in Mr. Cowley's

¹ The "Purple Island" seems always to have found a few appreciative readers. Warton referred to it in his *Observations* of 1754, and in 1758, James Hervey wrote to a friend: "You some time ago sent me a poem, with which I was much delighted, notwithstanding the uncouth metre and obsolete words; I mean Fletcher's "Purple Island." . . . I wish any bookseller could be prevailed with to reprint the "Purple Island," and add to it "Christ's Victory," etc., in one neat volume. I believe it would sell, if properly revised and altered. . . . Had I been in perfect health . . . I question whether I should not have retouched the poetry, changed several of the obsolete words, illustrated the obscure passages by occasional notes, and run the risk of publishing the whole at my own expense." (Hervey's *Works*, Edinburgh, 1769, Letter CCVI, p. 696b.) Even Goldsmith quoted Fletcher approvingly. I do not know whether or not any of these men had anything to do with an ed. of Fletcher in 1789.

Davideis (for the Quadraints of Sir Wm. Davenant, and the Stanza of 9 in Spenser's "Fairy Queen," which are but an Improvement of the Ottava Rima, to instance in no more, seem not to me so proper), . . . let us give it the Character, as to its Form, which it anciently had. . . .

Here at least is objection to alternate and stanza, but if it is urged that an author of 1679 was not likely to be thought "modern" after 1740, let us turn to Edward Bysshe's *Art of Poetry*, 1702. He speaks of Chaucer's *Troilus*, Spenser's "Fairy Queen," and of the Italians, and adds:

But this is now wholly laid aside, and Davenant, who compos'd his Gondibert in Stanzas of 4 Verses in alternate Rhyme, was the last that follow'd their example of intermingling Rhymes in Heroick Poems.

Bysshe's statement sounds like a bungling echo of Woodford, and perhaps, as found in a popular treatise, would be likely to attract Thompson's attention. Professor Phelps (*Eng. Rom. Movement*, p. 59) thinks that the "modern writer" was Dr. Johnson, who criticized the Spenserians in *The Rambler* in May, 1751. But reference to Johnson's remarks (pp. 17 f. below) will show that he says nothing of objections to "alternate and stanza."

The first eighteenth-century writer to tell us at any length of his experience with Spenser was William Shenstone, who wrote to his friend Richard Graves as follows:

"THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS," [1741?]

Some time ago, I read Spenser's "Fairy Queen"; and, when I had finished, thought it a proper time to make some additions and corrections, in my trifling imitation of him, the "School-mistress." His subject is certainly bad, and his action inexpressibly confused; but there are some particulars in him that charm one. Those which afford the greatest scope for a ludicrous imitation are, his simplicity and obsolete phrase; and yet these are what give one a very singular pleasure in the perusal. The burlesque which they occasion is of quite a different kind to that of Philips's "Shilling," Cotton's "Travestie," "Hudibras," or Swift's works; but I need not tell *you* this.

JANUARY 19, 1741-42

The true burlesque of Spenser (whose characteristic is simplicity) seems to consist in a *simple* representation of such things as one laughs to *see* or to *observe* one's self, rather than in any *monstrous* contrast betwixt the thoughts and words. I cannot help thinking that my added stanzas have more of his manner than what you saw before, which you are not a judge of, till you have read him.

JUNE, 1742

. . . . I am glad you are reading Spenser; though his plan is detestable, and his *invention* less wonderful than most people imagine, who do not much consider the obviousness of allegory; yet, I think, a person of your disposition must take great delight in his *simplicity*, his good-nature, &c. Did you observe a stanza that begins a canto somewhere, "Nought is there under heav'n's wide hollowness That breeds," &c.¹

When I bought him first, I read a page or two of the "Fairy Queen," and cared not to proceed. After that, Pope's "Alley" made me consider him ludicrously; and in that light, I think, one may read him with pleasure. I am now (as Ch——m——ley with ——), from trifling and laughing at him, really in love with him. I think even the metre pretty (though I shall never use it in earnest); and that the last Alexandrine has an extreme majesty. . . . Does not this line strike you (I do not justly remember what canto it is in); "Brave thoughts and noble deeds did *evermore* inspire."² Perhaps it is my fancy only that is enchanted with the running of it.

[Undated, but ? 1742]

I dare say it must be incorrect; for I have added eight or ten stanzas within this fortnight. But inaccuracy is more excusable in ludicrous poetry than in any other. If it strikes *any*, it must be people of *taste*; for people of *wit* without taste (which comprehends the larger part of the critical tribe) will unavoidably despise it. I have been at some pains to secure myself from A. Philips's misfortune, of mere *childishness*, "little charm of placid mien," &c. I have added a ludicrous index, purely to shew (fools) that I am in jest: and my motto, "O qua sol habitabiles illustrat oras, maxime principum," is calculated for the same purpose. You cannot conceive how large the number is of those that mistake burlesque for the very foolishness it exposes (which observation I made once at the Rehearsal, at Tom Thumb, at Chrononhotonthologos; all which are pieces of elegant humour). I have some mind to pursue this caution further; and advertise it, "The School-mistress, &c." A very childish performance everybody knows (novorum more). But if a person seriously calls this, or rather, burlesque, a childish or low species of poetry, he says wrong. For the most regular and formal poetry may be called trifling, folly, and weakness, in comparison of what is written with a more *manly* spirit in ridicule of it.

NOVEMBER 22, 1745

I have read Spenser once again, and I have added full as much more to my "School-mistress," in regard to *number of lines*; *something* in point of *matter* (or *manner* rather) *which* does not displease me.

¹ I, III, 1; the second line reads, "That moves," etc.

² IV, x, 26, line 9.

1746, "ineunte anno"

I thank you for your perusal of that trivial poem. If I were going to print it, I should give way to your remarks *implicitly*, and would not *dare* to do otherwise. But so long as I keep it in manuscript, you will pardon my silly prejudices if I chuse to read and shew it with the addition of most of my new stanzas. I own I have a fondness for several, imagining them to be *more* Spenser's way, yet more independent on the antique phrase, than any part of the poem; and, on that account, I cannot yet prevail on myself to banish *them* entirely; but were I to print, I should (with *some* reluctance) give way to your sentiments (which I know are just), namely, that they render the work too diffuse and flimzy, and seem rather excrescences than essential parts of it.¹

Professor Phelps has already called attention to the way in which Shenstone, drawn to Spenser by Pope's imitation, gradually came to change from parody to sincere imitation, though I think Professor Phelps has made rather more than is fair of Shenstone's reluctance to take himself or Spenser seriously. The passages given above (all but the last two are quoted by Professor Phelps) furnish another instance of the half-conscious struggle between an actual taste for what we now call Romantic things, and the deference due such autocratic oracles of "authority" as Pope. Robust, hearty John Dryden, at a time when pseudo-Classical dogma was growing more authoritative every day, went through this same struggle, and at the last leaned toward freedom. Thomas Gray living toward the close of pseudo-Classical dominance, also went through his struggles and his compromises. (Has it not often been remarked that the "Elegy" owes its unrivaled popularity to its blend of gently Romantic feeling and Classic expression?) Shenstone and a score of other writers—representative surely of a strong minority of the readers of that day—also wavered between the calls of taste and of authority, and often ended by admitting the rule of authority—but kept their likings.

In 1747, according to Nichols' *Literary Anecdotes*, I, 653 (ed. of 1812), Dr. Thomas Morell published "Spenser's *Works*, by subscription." Gordon Goodwin, in the *DNB*, records that "Morell is said to have issued by subscription an edition of Spenser's *Works*." Nichols' statement is positive and unhesitating, but I have thus far

¹ All of these citations are from Shenstone's *Letters*, 1769, pp. 61, 63, 66, 69, 120, and 121.

found no other hint of the existence of such an edition. In 1737, however, Morell edited Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which by confusion may possibly have been the basis of Nichols' entry.

In April, 1748, James Thomson wrote to his friend Patterson: "After fourteen or fifteen years the 'Castle of Indolence' comes abroad in a fortnight." At the end of the poem Thomson added this "Advertisement":

This Poem being writ in the Manner of Spenser, the obsolete Words, and a Simplicity of Diction in some of the Lines, which borders on the Ludicrous, were necessary to make the Imitation more perfect. And the Stile of that admirable Poet, as well as the Measure in which he wrote, are as it were appropriated by Custom to all Allegorical Poems writ in our Language; just as in French the Stile of Marot who lived under Francis I has been used in Tales, and familiar Epistles, by the politest Writers of the Age of Louis XIV.

Both Shenstone and Thomson talk about the "ludicrous" effect of Spenser's diction; and yet both poets wrote perfectly serious, sympathetic poems, and Thomson succeeded better than anyone else, with the possible exceptions of Keats and Tennyson, in equaling Spenser on his own ground. This contradiction between their criticism and their practice seems to me to point inevitably to the conclusion that they were "unwilling witnesses," and that their critical vocabulary was already more hopelessly inadequate than they realized.¹ In November, 1748, Shenstone wrote to Jago:

Thomson's poem amused me greatly. . . . I think his plan has faults; particularly that he should have said nothing of the diseases attending laziness in his *first* canto, but reserved them to strike us more affectingly in the last, but on the whole, who would have thought that Thomson could have so well imitated a person remarkable for simplicity both of sentiment and phrase?²

In 1750, the Tonsons reissued John Hughes's edition of Spenser's *Works*. Hughes had died in 1720, so a "learned and anonymous author"³ furnished the "Remarks on Spenser's Poems" in the first volume. In March, 1751, Robert Lloyd published his "Progress of Envy," already referred to, and Gilbert West published the first

¹ An illuminating parallel is Byron; in the early stanzas of "Childe Harold" he imitates Spenser's diction, with ironic effect, but soon drops imitation and takes full advantage of the opportunities of the stanza for pictorial narration.

² *Letters*, 1769, p. 174.

³ See Upton's "Letter," and Warton's *Observations*.

(and only) canto of his poem on "Education" in the regular Spenserian stanza. In May, John Upton addressed to West a "Letter concerning a new edition of Spenser's *Fairy Queen*," in the course of which he said:

Whilst I am in this humour of finding fault, let me consider whether Spenser is altogether blameless for that foolish choice (shall I call it?) of his so frequent returning rhyme in a stanza of nine verses. What fetters for neither rhyme nor reason has he voluntarily put on? And many a bad spelling, many a lame thought and expression is he forced to introduce, merely for the sake of a jingling termination. Verse does not consist in that tinkling sound of similar endings, which was brought into Italy by Goths and Huns, but in proper measure and cadence, and both letters and words corresponding to the sense. Milton saw and avoided the rock which Spenser split on; in other respects, Spenser's imagination was greater.

In May also, Moses Mendez published his "Seasons. In Imitation of Spenser," and Dr. Samuel Johnson, in the *Rambler* for Tuesday, May 14, attacked the Spenserians. I quote his last three paragraphs:

There are, I think, two schemes of writing, on which the laborious wits of the present time employ their faculties. One is the adaptation of sense to all the rhymes which our language can supply to some word, that makes the burthen of the stanza; but this, as it has been only used in a kind of amorous burlesque, can scarcely be censured with much acrimony. The other is the imitation of Spenser, which, by the influence of some men of learning and genius, seems likely to gain upon the age, and therefore deserves to be more attentively considered.

To imitate the fictions and sentiments of Spenser can incur no reproach, for allegory is perhaps one of the most pleasing vehicles of instruction. But I am very far from extending the same respect to his diction or his stanza. His style was in his own time allowed to be vicious, so darkened with old words and peculiarities of phrase, and so remote from common use, that Johnson boldly pronounces him *to have written no language*. His stanza is at once difficult and unpleasing; tiresome to the ear by its uniformity, and to the attention by its length. It was at first formed in imitation of the Italian poets, without due regard to the genius of our language. The Italians have little variety of termination, and were forced to contrive such a stanza as might admit the greatest number of similar rhymes; but our words end with so much diversity, that it is seldom convenient for us to bring more than two of the same sound together. If it be justly observed by Milton, that rhyme obliges poets to express their thoughts in improper terms, these improprieties must always be multiplied, as the difficulty of rhyme is increased by long concatenations.

The imitators of Spenser are indeed not very rigid censors of themselves, for they seem to conclude, that when they have disfigured their lines with a few obsolete syllables, they have accomplished their design, without considering that they ought not only to admit old words, but to avoid new. The laws of imitation are broken by every word introduced since the time of Spenser, as the character of Hector is violated by quoting Aristotle in the play. It would indeed be difficult to exclude from a long poem all modern phrases, though it is easy to sprinkle it with gleanings of antiquity. Perhaps, however, the style of Spenser might by long labor be justly copied; but life is surely given us for higher purposes than to gather what our ancestors have wisely thrown away, and to learn what is of no value, but because it has been forgotten.

Late in the year, Brindley published an edition of the *Fairy Queen* in three quarto volumes, with notes by Thomas Birch. Early in 1754 (Lowndes says wrongly 1752), Thomas Warton published his "Observations on the 'Fairy Queen' of Spenser" in which he deals at some length with Spenser's stanza and versification. In speaking of Spenser's "loathsome images," Warton says:

The truth is, the strength of our author's imagination could not be suppressed on any subject; and, in some measure, it is owing to the fulness of his stanza, and the reiteration of his rhymes, that he described these offensive objects so minutely.¹

In Section IV, "Of Spenser's Stanza, Versification, and Language," he said:

Although Spenser's favourite Chaucer had made use of the *ottava rima*, or stanza of eight lines; yet it seems probable that Spenser was principally induced to adopt it, with the addition of one line, from the practice of Ariosto and Tasso, the most fashionable poets of his age. But Spenser, in chusing this stanza, did not sufficiently consider the genius of the English language, which does not easily fall into a frequent repetition of the same termination; a circumstance natural to the Italian, which deals largely in identical cadences.

Besides, it is to be remembered, that Tasso and Ariosto did not embarrass themselves with the necessity of finding out so many similar terminations as Spenser. Their *ottava rima* has only three similar endings, alternately rhyming. The two last lines formed a distinct rhyme. But in Spenser, the second rhyme is repeated four times, and the third three.

This constraint led our author into many absurdities; the most striking and obvious of which seem to be the following.

¹ Ed. of 1807, I, 97.

I. It obliged him to dilate the thing to be expressed, however unimportant, with trifling and tedious circumlocutions, viz.:

Now hath fair Phoebe, with her silver face,
Thrice seen the shadows of this nether world,
Sith last I left that honourable place,
In which her royal presence is enroll'd. 2.3.44.

That is, "it is three months since I left her palace."

II. It necessitated him, when matter failed towards the close of a stanza, to run into a ridiculous redundancy and repetition of words, viz.:

In which was nothing pourtrahed nor wrought,
Nor wrought nor pourtrahed, but easie to be thought. 2.9.33.

III. It forced him, that he might make out his complement of rhymes to introduce a puerile or impertinent idea, viz.:

Not that proud towre of Troy, though richly *gilt*. 2.9.45.

Being here laid under the compulsion of producing a consonant word to *spilt* and *built*, which are preceding rhymes, he has mechanically given us an image at once little and improper.

To the difficulty of a stanza so injudiciously chosen, I think we may properly impute the great number of his ellipses, some of which will be pointed out at large in another place; and it may be easily conceived, how that constraint which occasioned superfluity, should at the same time be the cause of omission.

Notwithstanding these inconveniencies flow from Spenser's measure, it must yet be owned, that some advantages arise from it; and we may venture to affirm, that the fullness and significance of Spenser's descriptions is often owing to the prolixity of his stanza, and the multitude of his rhymes. . . . The discerning reader is desired to consider the following stanza, as an instance of what is here advanced. Guyon is binding Furor.

With hundred iron chains he did him bind
And hundred knots, which did him sore constraine;
Yet his great iron teeth he still did grind,
And grimly gnash, threatening revenge in vaine:
His burning eyen, whom bloudie strakes did staine,
Stared full wide, and threw forth sparks of fire;
And more for ranke despight, than for great paine,
Shakt his long locks colour'd like copper wire,
And bit his tawny beard to shew his raging ire. 2.4.15.

In the subsequent stanza there are some images, which perhaps were produced by a multiplicity of rhymes.

He all that night, that too long night did passe,
And now the day out of the ocean-maine
Began to peep above this earthly masse,

With pearly dew sprinkling the morning grasse;
 Then up he rose like heavy lump of leade,
 That in his face, as in a looking-glasse,
 The signs of anguish one might plainly read. 3.5.26.

It is indeed surprising, upon the whole, that Spenser should execute a poem of uncommon length, with so much spirit and ease, laden as he was with so many shackles, and embarrassed with so complicated a *bondage* of *riming*. Nor can I recollect, that he has been so careless as to suffer the same word to be repeated as a rhyme to itself, in more than four or five instances; a fault which, if he had more frequently committed, his manifold beauties of versification would have obliged us to overlook. . . .

Like Dr. Johnson and too many others, Warton is here arguing chiefly *a priori*. His fault-finding might be appropriate enough if he were dealing with Popean couplets. His praise of Spenser, too, which really hits upon Spenser's peculiar excellences, is obscured by his half-apologetic, timid manner. Appreciation is there, but the possibility of there being two equally admirable but sharply contrasted kinds of writing is only half suspected.

In 1755, in the *Connoisseur* for May 8 (No. 67), Robert Lloyd, who had himself in 1751 perverted Spenser's stanza, turned his ridicule rather cleverly upon the imitators in the following lines:

Others, who aim at fancy, choose
 To woo the gentle Spenser's muse.
 The poet fixes for his theme
 An allegory, or a dream.
 Fiction and truth together joins
 Thro' a long waste of flimsy lines;
 Fondly believes his fancy glows,
 And image upon image grows;
 Thinks his strong Muse takes wondrous flights,
 Whene'er she sings of peerless wights,
 Of dens, of palfreys, spells, and knights,
 'Till allegory, Spenser's veil,
 T' instruct and please in moral tale,
 With him 's no veil the truth to shroud,
 But one impenetrable cloud.

In this same year, Cornelius Arnold prefaced his satire, "The Mirror; in the manner of Spenser," with the statement that:

He thinks he need not make any Apology for the Stile and Measure of the Verse, they being generally, if not universally allowed, the most suitable for works of this kind.

When Arnold republished the "Mirror" in his *Poems on Several Occasions* two years later, he expanded his apology to read, in the phrases of his predecessors:

The Author begs leave to premise, that in this Essay he has retained some few of the old Words of Spenser, and adopted the Simplicity of the Diction in the ludicrous Cast, at the end of most of the Stanzas, to give it somewhat the exterior Air of that great Original, however far short he may have fell of the Spirit.

In May, 1756, William Huggins, who had translated Ariosto and Dante, irritated at the ignorance of Italian which he thought Warton showed in his *Observations*, published the "Observer Observ'd or Remarks on Observations on the 'Faïere Queene' of Spenser by T. Warton." He devoted himself chiefly to criticisms of Warton's Italian parallels, and had very little to say about Spenser.

Late in 1758, the Tonsons, who had published Hughes's edition of Spenser's *Works*, issued an edition of the "Fairy Queen" in two quarto volumes, edited by John Upton. (Lowndes, in addition to this edition, records one published by Tonson in two volumes octavo, but I know of no other mention of such an edition.) In the same year William Faden published an edition of the "Fairy Queen" in four volumes octavo, by Ralph Church. Both of these editions were noticed by the *Critical Review* in 1759: Upton's in September in half a page of high praise; Church's in February by Goldsmith, who calls Spenser "our old favorite," and quotes approvingly three stanzas from Phineas Fletcher, but says nothing of Spenser's stanza. In 1759 also there appeared "An Impartial Estimate of Mr. Upton's Notes on the 'Fairy Queen,'" which the *Gentleman's Magazine* noticed in April, and again in May. This essay is chiefly devoted to charging Upton with unacknowledged borrowings from Warton's *Observations*.

The close relation between the various manifestations of Romanticism showed itself in 1761 in a translation of Macpherson's "Fragment XIII": "Collect the earth and pile the stones on high," into the pseudo-Spenserian ten-line stanza. In 1782, Andrew Macdonald, apparently influenced both by Beattie's "Minstrel" (as the *Critical Review* for March, 1783, pointed out) and by Ossian, published two poems in the regular stanza, "Minvela" in 19 stanzas, and "Velina"

in 99 stanzas, both called "Fragments." Macpherson's *Ossian* and Gray's *Northern Odes* were signs of the trend of interest, and undoubtedly helped to make the amazing popularity of Percy's *Reliques*. Beattie's "Minstrel," a poem on a northern theme written in the Spenserian stanza, furnishes another instance of how the various streams of Romanticism mingled their currents. While Professor Beers is right in pointing out¹ that there was no organized propaganda of Romanticism (there rarely has been such a thing in the history of English literature—the pre-Raphaelites are almost unique), he seems to me wrong in his implication that the indications of the change were sporadic and unconnected, for where we find one man who shows interest in only one phase of the Romantic revival, we find three who are concerned with two or more phases. Among a host I may cite James Thomson, accurate describer of nature, writer of blank verse and of Spenserian stanzas; William Shenstone, Spenserian, and chief counselor of Dodsley's *Collection* and Percy's *Reliques*; Thomas Edwards, Shaksperian, Spenserian, and sonneteer; William Julius Mickle, balladist, sonneteer, and Spenserian.

As has already been said, the eighteenth century as well as the seventeenth seemed chiefly impressed by the allegory of the "Fairy Queen"; and this allegory, because it is both elusive and contradictory, seemed out of keeping with the eighteenth century's rather formal ideas of what an epic should be. Elizabeth Cooper, in the *Muses Library*, 1737, I, 255, blamed Ariosto, for she wrote:

Had he [Spenser] never debauch'd his Taste with the Extravagancies of Ariosto, He might have vied in Fame (if we may judge by Translations) with the most venerated of the Antients, and deterr'd the most ingenious Moderns from hoping to equal Him.

A reviewer in the *Monthly Review* for January, 1762, in a notice of Macpherson's *Fingal*, had something of the same notion, for he took occasion to say:

We should, for our own part, almost as soon rank Spenser's "Fairy Queen" among the epic poems, as the celebrated allegorical performance of Ariosto.

Perhaps both of these go back to Dryden's comments that "Ariosto's style is luxurious, without majesty or decency," and that "Tasso

¹ *English Romanticism, Eighteenth Century*, pp. 422-23.

confesses himself too lyrical . . . beneath the dignity of heroic verse."¹

In 1767, William Julius Mickle, the translator of the *Lusiads* published anonymously a poem of 136 Spenserian stanzas, called "The Concubine." To a second edition in 1769, he prefixed an "Advertisement" which began: "When this poem was first offered to the public, it was not accompanied with any prefatory address." The last paragraph ran:

Some reasons, perhaps, may be expected for having adopted the manner of Spenser. To propose a general use of it were indeed highly absurd; yet it may be presumed there are some subjects on which it may be used with advantage. But not to enter upon any formal defence, the Author will only say, that the fulness and wantonness of description, the quaint simplicity, and, above all, the ludicrous, of which the antique phraseology and manner of Spenser are so happily and peculiarly susceptible, inclined him to esteem it not solely as the best, but the only mode of composition adapted to his subject.

This advertisement was slightly changed in an edition of 1771, and still further in 1777, when the poem was published with Mickle's name as "Sir Martyn, a Poem in the Manner of Spenser," with the statement that "this attempt in the Manner of Spenser was first published in 1767, since which time it has passed through some editions under the title of the 'Concubine.'" Mickle, to be sure, has nothing new to say; he clings as his predecessors did to the "ludicrous"; but his references to "the fulness and wantonness of description" and "the quaint simplicity" of Spenser sound less like apology and more like the open praise we are to hear from Beattie.

Thomas Chatterton, however important he may be as a Romanticist, is surprisingly like Spenser's disciples of the first quarter of the seventeenth century, in that he experimented with a final Alexandrine in a number of stanza-forms, without once using Spenser's own stanza. The most of his seven imitative stanzas are mere uses of forms familiar to both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—the *ababcc*, the rhyme-royal,² and Prior's

¹ "Essay on Satire," 1693, *Scott-Saintsb.*, XIII, 15.

² Professor Saintsbury, in his *English Prosody*, II, 523, characteristically remarks that Chatterton's "Ballad of Charity" "is the first resurrection for many a day of rhyme-royal with an Alexandrine ending." In January, 1737, the *Gentleman's Magazine* printed two poems in this stanza, "The Country Parson," and "The Country Curate"; the first of these was reprinted in Dodsley's *Collection* in 1758, and in *A Select Collection*

stanza. The total number of stanzas, of various rhyme-schemes, which Chatterton ended with an Alexandrine, number only 259. However, 189, or about three-fourths of these, are in a stanza of Chatterton's own devising, which runs *ababbcbdd*. Chatterton has kept the linked quatrains, and has merely substituted for Spenser's ninth line a couplet on a new rhyme—a scheme which is half-way between Spenser's stanza and Prior's. Chatterton has not had followers in the use of this stanza, so far as I know, but, though he doubtless invented it for himself, Alexander Scott had used the rhyme-scheme before 1568, William Browne of Tavistock had used it in 1614 in nine stanzas of the fifth eclogue of "The Shepherd's Pipe," and William Lisle, in 1628, wrote a stanza which is Chatterton's exactly.

In September, 1766, Beattie wrote to Dr. Blacklock:

Not long ago I began a poem in the style and stanza of Spenser, in which I propose to give full scope to my inclination, and be either droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humor strikes me; for, if I mistake not, the manner which I have adopted admits equally of all these kinds of composition. I have written 150 lines, and am surprised to find the structure of that complicated stanza so little troublesome. I was always fond of it, for I think it the most harmonious that ever was contrived. It admits of more variety of pause than either the couplet or the alternate rhyme; and it concludes with a pomp and majesty of sound, which, to my ear, is wonderfully delightful. It seems also very well adapted to the genius of our language, which, from its irregularity of inflection and number of monosyllables, abounds in diversified terminations, and, consequently renders our poetry susceptible of an endless variety of legitimate rhymes.

When the first book of the "Minstrel" finally appeared, in 1771, Beattie rephrased some of his ideas in his "Preface":

I have endeavoured to imitate Spenser in the measure of his verse, and in the harmony, simplicity, and variety of his composition. Antique expressions I have avoided; admitting, however, some old words, where they seemed to suit the subject: but I hope none will be found that are now obsolete, or in any degree not intelligible to a reader of English poetry.

To those, who may be disposed to ask, what could induce me to write in so difficult a measure, I can only answer, that it pleases my ear, and

of Poems at Edinburgh, in 1768; the second was reprinted as "by Mr. T." in the London Magazine for January, 1760. In 1746, Thomas Blacklock's "An Hymn to Divine Love, an imitation of Spenser" appeared in his Poems on Several Occasions, at Glasgow.

seems, from its Gothic structure and original, to bear some relation to the subject and spirit of the Poem. It admits both simplicity and magnificence of sound and of language, beyond any other stanza that I am acquainted with. It allows the sententiousness of the couplet, as well as the more complex modulation of blank verse. What some critics have remarked of its uniformity growing at last tiresome to the ear, will be found to hold true, only when the poetry is in other respects faulty.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* promptly reviewed the "Minstrel" in May, and with a reviewer's disregard of the author's preface, made the very criticisms which Beattie had tried to forestall. The following are the only points of consequence:

The author has chosen to write in the stanza which Spenser imitated from the Italian, for which every reader of unvitiated taste will certainly be sorry.

An ear not used to the stanza of Spenser is rather disappointed than gratified by the rhyme; and to him that has read it long enough to expect the rhyme, it can scarce fail to have become tiresome. . . . the tedious Alexandrine which constantly ends the song, "And like a wounded snake drags its slow length along."

Our author however, has been content to recur to the rudiments of our versification, without recurring also, as many others have done, to the rudiments of our language, he has used neither antiquated dialect nor obsolete terms, and the melody of his verses, taken separately, almost atones for the barbarous dissonance of his stanza.

One significant item in Beattie's preface is his claim for the Spenserian stanza of the "complex modulation of blank verse." At least after 1700, blank verse had never been in total eclipse, as many have believed, but had merely been overshadowed. Throughout the first half of the century, and long before Thomson's *Seasons* or Young's *Night Thoughts*, blank verse had been constantly used for the serious expression of lofty ideas. The influence of Milton grew constantly greater, and appreciation of his verse led to a fondness for his "modulations," which helped materially in encouraging poets to try verse-forms other than the couplet—in particular, the Spenserian stanza and the sonnet. The steadily increasing practice of the sonnet after 1750—and the revival of the sonnet owed more to Milton than to any other ten men—was based as much as on anything else upon the fact that the sonnet offered an escape from the couplet, and, in the Miltonian sonnet especially, allowed and

in part depended upon varied pauses. The eighteenth-century couplet was as rigid a verse-form as England had ever known; the heroic, or elegiac, quatrain did not escape from the tyranny of rather narrow limits; and the anapestic measures so common in the lighter verse of the day seemed obviously to lack dignity. Consequently, the flourishing of blank verse, of the sonnet, and of the roomy, adaptable Spenserian stanza, might, it seems, have been clearly foreseen. As a matter of fact, it was not foreseen, and until recently it has been recognized only grudgingly and imperfectly.

In 1775 an anonymous writer published at Bristol "Clifton, in imitation of Spenser," with a preface in which he remarked:

. . . . I imitate Spenser whose works are now but seldom read. . . . The quaintness of his expression, the obsolescence of his terms and the frequent recurrence of his rhymes are very general objections to one of the greatest poets who ever lived . . . a thought occurred to me in a pensive walk, and occurred to me in the Stanza of Spenser.

His statement that Spenser's "works are now but seldom read" is not to be taken too seriously; what with an edition in 1750, another of the "Fairy Queen" in 1751, and two in 1758, and the numerous imitations of his stanza (which would surely send some readers to the original), Spenser must have been read fairly often. At least since the days of Horace and Juvenal it has been a literary commonplace to bewail "the degeneracy of modern taste."

The debate about Spenser gradually shifted from his language and his rhymes to the more general question of the use of stanza for long narrative poems. This shifting of the field shows clearly in the *Gentleman's Magazine's* review of a second edition of Hugh Downman's "Land of the Muses," a poem in the Spenserian stanza first published in 1767. A comparison of this review (in March, 1791) with that of the "Minstrel" in 1771, makes it evident that the *Gentleman's Magazine* had changed either its reviewer or its ideas:

[The "Land of the Muses" is] commonly spoken of in terms of high approbation. We say *commonly*, because there were some, and those people of acknowledged taste, who objected to the obsolete phraseology of Spenser, in imitation of whom it was written. . . . Whether, however, that obsolete style, and the *octave rhyme* are not better adapted to scenes where Fancy ranges unrestrained, to magic charms, and those ideal beings who people the land of Allegory, and "float in light vision 'round the poet's head"

may admit of some doubt. We own a predilection for those numbers which Spenser so happily adopted, and which possibly may arise merely from his having so successfully used them.

My last quotation for the eighteenth century also questions the use of stanza. In 1795, William Roscoe, in his *Life of Lorenzo de' Medici* (I, 279, n. 682, l. 12), wrote:

Notwithstanding those illustrious authorities [Ariosto and Tasso], it may perhaps be allowable to doubt, whether a series of stanzas be the most eligible mode of narrating an epic, or indeed any other extensive kind of poem. That it is not natural, must be admitted; for naturally we do not apportion the expression of our sentiments into equal divisions; and that which is not natural, cannot in general long be pleasing. Hence the works of Ariosto, of Tasso, and of Spenser, labour under a disadvantage which it requires all the vigour of genius to surmount and this is the more to be regretted, as both the Italian and the English languages admit of compositions in blank verse, productive of every variety of harmony.

In much reading of minor poets, I have found those of the seventeenth century rather more constantly interesting and various than those of the eighteenth; perhaps the reason is that in the seventeenth century the English muse was more often lyrical. In the eighteenth century the prevalence of the couplet meant more logic, more intellect untouched by deep feeling; and yet the eighteenth century's devotion to Spenser was more constant, more fruitful, and found a more responsive audience than before. It is perhaps remarkable that in 1648, at the height of the Puritan movement, Robert Herrick should have published his wonderful lyrics, and that they should have gone almost without comment for more than a hundred years. But it is surely much more remarkable that in 1748, the "Castle of Indolence"—the most Spenserian poem between Spenser and Keats—should have appeared at the height of Pope's influence, and should have been eagerly read and admired. Herrick fell on evil times, as one may easily see, and Thomson ought also, so far as a-priori conjecture goes, to have found his readers in later generations than his own. That Thomson was immediately liked is the best evidence that the influence of Pope and Johnson was not overwhelming.

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